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# THE J. EDGAR HOOVER STORY

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John Edgar Hoover had a bulldog jaw and a bulldog's bite and this hot-spoken rigid disciplinarian, openly recognized in Washington as one of the nation's most powerful figures, was also one of the most controversial. But even his harshest critics had to concede that almost single-handedly, Hoover took a ramshackle, discredited government bureau and built it into one of the world's foremost law enforcement agencies.

Presidents who might have wanted to fire him didn't dare; one or two of those who had examined the possibility discovered quickly that Hoover had won nationwide esteem and acceptance as leader of the one law enforcement agency that couldn't be bought.

Beyond that, Hoover personally had been able to establish himself as a living example of the virtues he insisted bound the country together and sustained it in time of stress. As President Nixon put it, he was the "embodiment of the values he cherished most; courage, patriotism, dedication to his country and granite-like honesty and integrity."

## Tenure Stirred Controversy

In his relentless pursuit of foreign agents as well as home-grown Communists and radical leftists who might be doing business with Communists, Hoover became anathema to many liberals, particularly those on the far left. His tenure as FBI director, far beyond the compulsory retirement age of 70, became an issue in at least two presidential campaigns.

Hoover earned his greatest public acclaim running down kidnapers and bank robbers at a time when violent crime swept across the land in wholesale lots. But perhaps an even greater accomplishment was recorded in the dark and dangerous realm of counter-espionage.

The late Allen Dulles, who once directed the CIA, praised Hoover for building the most outstanding counterespionage organization in the world. The FBI was never seriously penetrated by enemy agents—nor was the bureau ever tarnished by scandal.

Hoover always was proud to boast of his special agents: "They can't be bought."

Hoover kept the bureau under his thumb, never easing for a moment the constant pressure, demanding obedience and loyalty to his person and his agency. Even his close assistants always referred to him publicly as "The Director."

Hoover's realm was his own; he could and would disdain more than cursory allegiance to an attorney general he did not trust, and there were several of these through the years.

It was common belief in Washington that Hoover's "raw files" on thousands, perhaps millions, of persons included so much dirt that politicians were scared of him. Congressional committees have heard testimony as recently as this week that the FBI had titillating material about the personal and highly private lives of prominent individuals, which had been sent to former President Johnson for bedtime reading.

There is no question that the FBI files do contain tons of reports on individuals. It was suspected that Hoover had leaked some of the data for vengeful purposes, arousing a mighty clamor among liberals 20 years ago.

## Fought to Sustain Secrecy

But Hoover has been as fiercely protective of the FBI "raw files" as a mother tiger, fighting repeatedly and successfully before the courts and before congressional committees to keep this information sealed from public view.

The FBI's use of wiretaps to obtain evidence brought charges from Hoover's critics that he was listening in on thousands of private telephone conversations. Here again he became—in the eyes of his detractors—a symbol of fear, repression and a police state.

Because wiretapping is a costly, time-and-man-power consuming business, Hoover used the tool mainly in counterespionage work and in the unceasing war against organized crime; the wiretap was effective in some kidnaping cases but was never employed as extensively as critics contended.

Hoover was adamant on one position: He would never allow the FBI to be turned into anything resembling a national police force, though efforts were made from time to time to have his jurisdiction expanded.

The boundaries of FBI authority were strictly delineated by law, and the agency never had the power attributed to it by people unfamiliar with the legal technicalities.

As Hoover built it, the FBI was an investigative agency; it was his contention that even in an investigation of an individual for security purposes in connection with appointment to government office, the FBI laid out all the facts but never made a recommendation for or against.

Hoover developed and built the FBI virtually out of his own head; there was nothing in his background to indicate that this native Washingtonian would develop into one of the world's foremost crime fighters.

He was the son of Dickerson Naylor Hoover, an employe of the Coast and Geodetic Survey, and the former Anna Marie Scheitlin, niece of the first Swiss consul general to the U.S. His mother was a strong woman; her son would learn discipline home.

J. Edgar was a boy soprano in a church choir. He taught a Sunday school class. He loved baseball, and his nose was smashed in a game, leaving a disfigurement that added to the grim and powerful features that would make Hoover look as tough as he was.

He was considered too small for football at Washington's Central High School, so he turned his energies to debating, scoring 12 straight victories arguing "The Fallacies of Woman Suffrage."

## Won Law Degree in 1916

Graduated from high school in 1913, Hoover found a job at the Library of Congress while he was attending law school at night. He obtained a law degree from George Washington University in 1916.

In 1919 he was made a special assistant to the attorney general, and in 1921, assistant director of the department's bureau of investigation.

The old bureau of investigation was in those days pretty cheerless outfit. The name wasn't changed to Federal Bureau of Investigation until 1935.

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